

THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH SAINTS

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A complete five-paneled altarpiece by Ugolino di Nerio da Siena has just been acquired by The Cleveland Museum of Art as a purchase from the bequest of Leonard C. Hanna, Jr..

It is one of the finest examples extant of XIV century Sienese painting masterpieces and is the most significant painting accessioned by the Museum during 1961. It is in a remarkably fine state of preservation.

The painter Duccio was the great and exalted creator of the Sienese style. Among Duccio's followers Ugolino was the most gifted and capable. As a draughtsman he made deeply incised outlines with painstaking care and accuracy. Ugolino's work expresses less tenderness and is more tragic and austere than Duccio's. His figures are more slender and monumental and have less grace. His designs have greater unity with more movement and sweep to the draperies. His colors are pure, rich and vivid. He invented elaborately tooled designs in gold ornament and haloes.

Ugolino called "perhaps the closest spiritual relative of Duccio" carried the Golden Age of Sienese painting to its logical conclusion. He worked at a time in Italy's history when Sienese painting was devoted almost exclusively to religious subjects often expressed in highly ~~religious~~ *emotional, fervently religious,* yet gently melancholy terms.

The Sienese were born panel painters and Ugolino followed the tradition. Their work was linear in style and highly decorative. Altarpieces of this period usually represented a single figure in the center surrounded by panels with narrative scenes concerning the life story of the principal subject.

The central panel of the new Cleveland altarpiece shows the Madonna and Child against a luminous gold ground. The Christ Child presses the Madonna's wimple close to her reflective face as she gazes toward the right and not at the spectator as is usual. Her mantle is the blue of deep night and is edged with gold filament. The dark color of



her veil signifies humility. Two stars - one on her forehead and one on her right arm symbolize nobility of thought. The Christ Child's tunic is a muted red and over it is draped a pale amethyst scarf with an overall Greek cross design in gold. Each of the smaller panels contains a Saint. The bearded St. James Major appears immediately to the right of the central panel wearing an olive green mantle and holding a Book of the Hours. His right hand is raised in benediction. Mary Magdalen is shown in the panel at the right of St. James. She is wearing a deep pink cloak over a vivid turquoise bodice and carries her white jar of ointment. At the immediate left of the Madonna is St. John the Baptist with tousled reddish hair and beard. He is holding a cross in his left hand and directing attention to the Madonna and Child with his right. He is dressed in a hair shirt, over which he wears a dull red cloak. St. Francis in monastic habit is at the extreme left holding his breviary and he is also <sup>o</sup> pointing to the Madonna. The frame is painted a brick red and is ornamented with black and white alternating quatrefoil and Greek cross designs in interlacing foliate pattern. Above each of the four small flanking panels is a pinnacle. Commencing at the left - St. Matthew over St. Francis; St. Paul with his sword and book, over St. John the Baptist; St. Peter with key and book, above St. James and St. Andrew above the Magdalen. In the center, over the Madonna and Child, in a much larger pinnacle, is a fine and well-preserved figure of the Crucified, set in a lonely desolate landscape.

This altarpiece, along with the Lippo Memmi already in the collection, gives the Museum two important examples of the best and earliest in Sienese art.